

Part 1

Trapped again!

But this time, Lance swore, they'd not get away without paying dearly for it!

Under the mesh of his gas-mask the lean lines of his jaw went taut. Tense, steely fingers flipped to the knobbed control instruments; the gleaming single-seater scout plane catapulted in a screaming somersault. Lance's ever-wary sixth sense told him the tongues of disintegrating flame had licked the plane's protected belly, and for the fact that it was protected he thanked again his stupendous luck. He pulled savagely at the squat control stick; the four Rahl-Diesels unleashed a torrent of power; and the slim scout rose like a comet, and hurtled, the altitude dial's nervous finger proclaimed, to ten thousand feet. Lance eased off the power, relaxed slightly, and glanced below.

They'd started off a squadron of fifteen planes. Thirteen had crumpled beneath that treacherous,

stabbing curtain of disintegrating flame. Only two of them were left—he and Praed.

Praed, of course!

The fellow's plane was pirouetting nearby. Lance was the squadron leader. He jammed his thin-lipped mouth close to the "mike" and rasped:

"They trapped us again! There's some damn spy at our base. Stand by, Praed! They'll send up a few men to wipe us out, too ... and we're goin' to square the account!"

He listened for Praed's answer. Presently it came.

"I can't! They got two of my motors. I'm limping badly. We'd better beat it while we can."

Lance's mouth curled. He roared:

"Go on, then, beat it! But I'm goin' to take a couple of 'em, anyway." Disgusted, filled with red anger, he flung the phones from his head, watched Praed's

plane whirl its stubby nose for home, settled himself alertly in the low, padded seat and concentrated his attention on the ground below.

He'd been right. Tiny, gray-clad figures were pouring from their barracks, rushing madly towards the dozen or so planes neatly drawn up on the field. Lance's mouth twitched. They probably wondered, down there, why the devil he didn't beat it—like Praed! He stroked the lever which controlled his five gas bombs, centered his battery of incendiary-bullet machine-guns and ruthlessly shoved the control stick full over.

The Rahl-Diesels pumped at full power; his plane plummeted downwards with the speed of light, a hurtling shell of steel. His unexpected move took the men below by surprise. Lance knew they needed at least ten minutes to prepare another salvo of disintegrating flame; he had about four minutes left.

There was a restless, thudding chatter, and his bullets began to mow them down.

Lance could see the horrified expressions of the men beneath, and chuckled grimly as they sought to escape the wrath of his hot guns. He flung bursts of spouting, acid-filled lead at the defenseless planes, and saw two of them collapse in shrouds of acrid white smoke. And still he dove.

At a bare one hundred feet he tugged the control stick back, and the tiny scout groaned under the pull of her motors. Then her snout jolted upwards. Lance pounded the gas bomb lever, and smiled a tight smile as he sensed the five pills sloping down from their compartment in the scout's belly.

A second later came a rolling, ear-numbing crash. Lance, safe at a perch of a few thousand feet, grinned as his narrowed eyes beheld the sticky curtain of death-crammed gas hug over the enemy base.

"That'll quiet 'em for a few minutes!" he muttered savagely.

A few minutes—but not more. And he had no more bombs; his ammunition belts were nearly depleted. "I

guess," he murmured, "I'd better follow that quitter, Praed. I've paid 'em for the boys they got, anyway!"

He levelled the plane out, threw a last glance at the carpet of gas he had laid, and spurred the purring Rahl-Diesels to their limit. His speed dial flashed round to five hundred, five-fifty—seventy—and finally rested, quivering, at the scout's full six hundred miles per hour.

Under the streamlined plane's speeding body the gnarled, bomb-torn terrain of Nevada hurtled by. A rather sad frown creased Lance's prematurely old brow as he glimpsed it. Thousands of lives had been thrown into that ground; the hot, tumbled waste was doused with freely-sacrificed blood, the blood of whole regiments of America's heroic First Home Army. Martyred men! Lance couldn't help swearing to himself at the bitter thought of that terrible reckoning day. It was the price his country had paid for her continued ignoring of the festering peril overseas. Slaughtered like sheep, those glorious regiments had been! Helpless, almost, before the ultra-modern war weapons of the United Slav hordes, they'd stopped

the numbingly quick advance merely by the weight of their bodies. Like little Belgium, in 1914. They'd held the Slavs to California, ravished, war-desolated California.

The thin front-line trenches far behind, Lance began a slanting dive that raised his speed well over six hundred. Through the front magnifying mirror he spied the squat khaki buildings of his base.

Werewolves of War, the batch of planes he belonged to had been christened, and it was a richly deserved title. In front of the front they fought, detailed to desperate, harrying missions, losing an average of ten men a day. The ordeal of gas and fire and acid bullets added five years to a man's brow overnight—if he served with the Werewolves of War.

Lance was only twenty-four, but his hair was splotched with dead gray strands; his eyes were hard and weary; his face lined with new wrinkles. Ah, well, it was war—and a losing war, he had to admit, that they fought. If a miracle didn't come, America would crumble even as old Europe had, before the overwhelming Slavish troops.

Even now, as Lance knew through various rumors, the Slavs were massed for a grand attack. And with what could America hold them back?

His helicopter props spun, and the scout nestled down lightly on the tarmac. Lance switched off the faithful Rahl-Diesels, swung open the tiny door and leaped from the enclosed cockpit.

"Sir," he rapped to thin, stern-browed Colonel Douglas, "there's no longer any doubt in my mind. This is the fifth time we've been anticipated—trapped! The enemy is informed directly of the attacking plans of our scout details. There's a spy at this base!" He lowered his eyes for a second and said in a queer tone of voice: "Thirteen of 'em went down to-day."

Colonel Douglas' tired face showed the never-ceasing strain he was under. He clasped hands behind his back, took a few nervous turns up and down the small office and finally, with a somewhat hopeless sigh, muttered:

"I know, Lance, I know. The devils! They seem to be aware of everything we plan. Yet what can we do? Look at the territory our front lines cover! More than two thousand miles of loosely held ground. And we're so damnably organized, man! Look here!"

He strode to the huge map which covered entirely one wall of the little room and ran his forefinger down the long red line, signifying the American front, which stretched crookedly from the Canadian border to the Gulf of California. Parallel to it was another line, of black—the United Slavs.

"It's so damned easy," Colonel Douglas said, "for a spy to slip over." He sighed again. "I fought in the scrap of 1917 as a kid of twenty; it was different then. But this is 1938, and it's a scientific war we're trying to fight." He sat down in his swivel chair. "How—how did they wipe you out to-day?"

"That blasted disintegrating flame again," Lance told him swiftly. "It's obvious, Colonel: how did the Slavs know we were going to raid that comparatively unimportant base of theirs at such and such a time?"

They had the flame shooters all ready for us—and at a place where they've never had them before! We came up at twenty-five thousand feet, dropped down in a full power dive, and"—he gestured widely—"biff! The flames caught us neatly at the regulation thousand feet. They got thirteen men. Only two got away, Praed and myself." His keen eyes were inquiring, and the colonel interpreted their look correctly.

"Praed," he murmured. "Yes, I saw him come back, by himself. He said you were following. Two of his motors were shot. He seems to bear a charmed life, doesn't he?"

Lance nodded. He didn't like to hint at the thought he had in mind. It seemed a cowardly, stab-in-the-back thing to do. Yet it was duty, and there was no questioning duty.

"I've never seen Praed shoot down an enemy plane," he said slowly. "This is the fifth time we've been ambushed—and Praed's never been caught. Somehow, he's always seemed to be aware of what was coming."

"You mean—?" the colonel questioned.

Lance shook his head. "I don't want to commit myself, Colonel Douglas, but—I'm suggesting that we—well—keep our eyes peeled, and perhaps watch certain members of the outfit more closely."

Douglas rose as his orderly, Ranth, came into the room. "Find Lieutenant Praed for me," the colonel ordered crisply. Then, turning to Lance, he said: "You'd better knock off a few hours' sleep. You are worn out."

Lance watched the orderly, Ranth, salute and leave. Ranth was heavy, thick-built, with closely set eyes. The young squadron leader was suddenly conscious that he was, as the colonel said, worn out; his limbs seemed leaden, his eyelids heavy. "I think you're right, sir," he murmured, and walked out onto the field.

Seeing Praed's machine drawn up with the overall-clad figure of a mechanic fussing at its motors, he wandered over to survey it. The scout was an exact

replica of his, a model of the famous Goshawk type. It was all motor—everything being sacrificed to speed. On either side of the stubby brow of the fuselage, which held the death-dealing battery of three machine-guns, were set the four Rahl-Diesel motors, back to back. The pilot's tiny enclosed cockpit was thus surrounded by engines. In the V-shaped, smooth-lined wings were the two helicopter props; further back, inside the steel-sheathed, bullet-like fuselage, the radio outfit and fuel tanks. The craft's rounded belly covered the gas bomb compartment.

The mechanic was a little cockney Englishman, a fugitive, like all his countrymen, from the horror which had stricken England suddenly and left her wallowing in her life blood. He looked up at Lance, and a smile broke forth on his wizened, sharp little face.

"It's got me beat, sir," he said in his curious, twanging voice. "Lieutenant Praed, 'e sez to me, 'Somethin' wrong with two of me motors,' 'e sez. 'They quit on me quite sudden like. Look 'em over, will you?' 'e sez.

So I been lookin' 'em over. But they ain't nothin' wrong with the bloody things, sir—nothin' at all!"

"It does seem funny, doesn't it, Wells?" Lance said levelly. He'd known it all along. Praed was a quitter—a yellow-belly—besides being—But he stopped there. He had no definite proof. It was unjust to accuse a man of *that* without definite, positive proof.

The little mechanic muttered some mysterious cockney curse, and then said, in an admiring tone:

"'Ow many of the swines' planes 'ave you shot down now, sir?"

"About twenty, I think," Lance told him gruffly. The cockney shot his breath out with a whistle.

"Cripes! You'll be up to that there Captain Hay soon if you keeps it up, sir!"

Lance laughed. Hay, the almost legendary hero of the American Air Force—who had shot down, so latest rumors said, fifty Slav planes—was far above him. "I'll

never reach Hay's record, Wells. I'll be doing pretty well if I bag half as many!" Then, seeing Ranth, the orderly, followed by Praed, he strode quickly away and came face to face with the latter.

For a moment the two men eyed each other, a taut silence between them. Praed's thin, sun-blackened countenance was immovable, masklike. His blue-green eyes met Lance's steadily. Finally Lance snorted and burst out:

"Why the hell did you run away, Praed? Scared stiff?"

Praed's low voice, devoid of all trace of emotion, asked: "What makes you think I was scared, Lance?"

"You know damn well what makes me think it! That lousy crack about your motors being shot!"

"Two of my motors were limping."

Lance gave a sarcastic chuckle. "Ask Wells about that, why don't you? He's got a few ideas on the subject."

Praed repeated: "Two of my motors were limping," and abruptly he turned away, leaving Lance fuming, and went into Colonel Douglas' office.

What would Douglas say to him? Accuse him outright of his suspicions? Put him under arrest as a spy? But he couldn't do that: there was, after all, no proof. Lance swore to himself; then, feeling a wave of weariness surge over him, went to the shack he was quartered in, kicked off his battered boots, stripped away his Sam Browne, and flung his lean body out on the hard, gray-sheeted cot. Seconds later he was lost in the sleep that comes to the physically exhausted. The desperate situation America was in, the whole savage war—everything, faded from his mind.

But to right and left of that cot stretched others—empty. The brave squadron Lance had led into the blue sky that morning now lay charred skeletons around the flame-throwers that had struck them down.

And in a dozen other aircraft bases behind the hard pressed lines were other empty cots. Time and time

again the Slav planes shot down two to the Americans' one; time and time again the treacherous disintegrating flames—the weapon which baffled America's scientists—had struck down whole squadrons that had been lured into traps, even as Lance's had been lured.

And even the Slav forces pushed forward....

Part 2

"You're wanted by Colonel Douglas, sir."

Lance felt a hand jarring his shoulder; he turned sleepily over, yawned, and stared up into the dark, full-cheeked face of Ranth, the orderly.

"Huh?"

"Colonel Douglas wants you," repeated Ranth. "It's five o'clock, sir."

Wearily Lance pulled on his boots and adjusted the military belt. The night was hot and sticky; somewhere, miles to the rear of the base, the batteries of long-distance guns were beginning their nightly serenade. Lance followed the orderly's broad, chunky back to the colonel's office.

The colonel gazed up with tired eyes from the welter of maps on his desk.

"Lance," he said, "I'm changing the routine of the night patrol. A fresh batch of youngsters came in this

afternoon to fill the empty files; two dozen new planes arrived by transport, too. I'm sending ten of them over for the night patrol; Stephens will take your place. I've got another errand for you—and Praed."

Lance was conscious that Ranth was standing quietly behind the colonel's chair. Douglas ordered him to attend to some errand and the orderly left.

"I had an interview with Praed," the colonel went on. "I didn't exactly accuse him of anything definite, but I think I threw a bit of a scare into him. To-night we'll give him the acid test.

"You and he will fly over to-night to investigate Hill 333. There have been rumors that the Slavs are massing there, and we want positive information. There's sure to be a fight. Watch Praed carefully. If he steers clear of any scrapping, well have enough to court-martial him on. Understand?"

Lance nodded.

"Right. It's a dangerous errand, Lance, but I'm confident you'll come through, as always. There's no one else who could handle the job. God, man, you're getting close to Hay's record! You'll be the top-notch of the service soon!"

The young man laughed briefly. "No danger of that. When do we take off, sir?"

Douglas consulted his watch. "Seven-fifteen. Come and get the dope from these maps. Hill 333's rather difficult to find."

"Anything been happening at the front, sir?"

The colonel passed both fine-fingered hands over his lined face. He said quietly: "Yes. The Slavs took twenty-five miles from us down in the lower sector. Just wiped our boys out. Those damnable flame-throwers and bullet-proof tanks, supported by God knows how many hundreds of planes. It's hell, Lance! Headquarters thinks they're going to unleash a general attack all along the line in the next few days.

And our resources—well, our back's against the wall. We're coming to death grips, man."

Seven-fifteen....

Lance pressed the starting button. His four motors choked, sputtered, then burst into a sweet, full-throated roar. He glanced over at Praed's plane, spun the small helicopter props over and pushed down the accelerator. The plane quivered, stuck its snout up and leaped like an arrow into the clean, darkening air. Lance gunned it to ten thousand feet, Praed following him neatly. Praed was a good pilot, no doubt about that. The two fighting machines hung for a second side by side; Lance eased off his helicopters and streaked away into the gloom at a breath-taking five hundred.

"I hope," muttered Colonel Douglas as the two tiny scouts sped from sight, "that everything goes smoothly. They're the men to do it, anyway. No better pilots in the whole service."

"Wot abaht that there Captain Hay, sir?" put in Wells, the mechanic, standing nearby. Colonel Douglas smiled.

"Oh, of course!" he amended. "I'd forgotten Hay!"

Once more they were anticipated! Lance, at thirty thousand feet—the Rahl-Diesels, with their perfected superchargers, were easily capable of a ceiling of sixty—had hovered above the position of Hill 333, pulled on his gas-mask and said through the microphone to Praed:

"Power dive to three thousand feet. Release your flares and take in all you can before they send up planes. We'll take 'em by surprise, but there's bound to be a fight. Got it?"

The steady reply came back: "Okay."

Whereat Lance set his teeth in his customary fighting grin, jockeyed up his ammunition belts, glanced at the flare-parachutes folded alongside the cabin and

plunged the scout in a dive that tipped six hundred and fifty miles and threatened to crack the speed dial.

But surprise? Nothing doing! Like angry hornets five Slav planes pounced on them at ten thousand feet. They'd been waiting there! Lance cursed savagely. He flung off his flares, Immelmanned up, and in less than two seconds had sent one Slav shrieking to the ground in flames. For the moment forgetting Praed, Lance followed after his flares, three Slavs attempting to sight their guns on the twisting, writhing, corkscrewing body of his Goshawk. He knew there were disintegrating flame-throwers below, but gambled on their not shooting because of the enemy scouts diving with him.

Flattening out at perhaps a thousand feet, Lance threw a rapid stare at the bulk of Hill 333. He drew his breath in sharply.

Lit dazzlingly by the bleaching white of the slow-floating flares, huge rows of the dreaded Slav tanks were clustered all around the hill!

As he looked, ten more Slav planes came soaring up from the ground. This was too hot! The thought of Praed stabbed through Lance's whirling brain; he pulled the scout around, doubled over the three closing in on his tail, and belched lead for an instant at one he'd caught off guard. It collapsed like a punctured paper bag. Lance grinned and bounded to the upper regions. The two other Slavs let the crazy Yank go for the instant, joining forces with the ten brothers coming to help them out.

Lance, again at ten thousand, looked for Praed. Far above, he glimpsed two planes, circling and diving. Praed seemed to be fighting, at any rate! As he watched, the two scouts catapulted still higher; became tiny, almost imperceptible dots, visible only in the reflected light of the flares. Then Lance felt a shaft of ice along his spine.

The two planes had practically hugged each other for a second. Then one of them fell away, somersaulted, tumbled down wildly—out of control.

It passed Lance like a falling rock.

And it was Praed's scout!

"My God!" muttered Lance. "He's been shot down!"

The next moment the twelve Slavs were on him like a hurricane. Motors roaring, Lance stood them off—flinging a burst of lead here, dropping out of range here, looping, catapulting, zooming—fazing them with every trick he knew. A dozen times he sensed the zinging wrath of storms of bullets, a dozen times he escaped death by the breadth of a hair. Not for nothing was he called one of the best pilots in the service, second only to Hay.

He bagged another of the Slavs, and began to think of getting away. Praed had proved himself, but had been killed in doing so. He's got the dope on Hill 333. Now for the getaway.

As he whirled, another Slav plane—the one that had got Praed—dove down from above. And, in the last second of the ghostly light of the flares, Lance's bewildered eyes saw the face of the man inside it.

That face was Praed's!

Praed, inside an enemy scout! Praed firing at him!

Praed, not dead!

Lance was dumbfounded. He almost died, just then, for he felt his senses stagger, and relaxed his maneuvering. Praed! What—how—He couldn't begin to reckon it out.

If the flares hadn't died at that instant, Lance must have been shot down. Luckily, they expired; pitch darkness washed over everything. The lights on the Slav planes switched on, their prying beams fingering the sky for Lance's plane. But Lance was somewhat himself again. He jammed the accelerator down, dove headlong, flattened out and streaked for home. The speed of the Goshawk snatched him faithfully from the jaws of the Slavs. He left then milling behind. Left Praed with them!

Colonel Douglas was waiting for him. Lance's face must have been a study, for the elder man laughed shortly. "You need a drink!" he decided, and poured

out a stiff tot of rum. Lance downed it with a nervous gulp and sprawled in a chair, the glass held weakly in quivering fingers.

Dead silence brooded over the whole base. Even the muttering guns were still. One green-shaded light threw the maps on Douglas' desk into glaring prominence; besides that, there was no illumination anywhere in the 'drome. Lance knew he had a thumping headache and that his eyes were lumps of pain. The glass fell from his hand and crashed on the floor. It seemed to stir the young captain, for at last he looked up and met the colonel's inquiring gaze.

"Well?" The colonel was terse.

"I saw Praed shot down," Lance mumbled, as if to himself, "and then I saw him—"

"Wait!" Douglas strode rapidly to the door which led to the other rooms of the building. After glancing to right and left, with an explanatory "Walls sometimes have ears, you know!" he locked the door carefully again, came back, and said:

"Talk in a whisper! How about Hill 333?"

"Tanks massed there," Lance said slowly. "Yeh, I saw that, all right. They must be intending an attack on that sector. But—but—Praed—"

"What happened?"

Lance told him of the scrap, how Praed's plane had apparently rubbed wings with a Slav and then tumbled down, out of control. He concluded: "I figured that Praed was all right, that he'd proved himself, that he wasn't a spy, as we'd thought. *But the next moment I saw him in the Slav plane that had bagged his!*"

His wondering eyes sought the colonel's lean face. Lance expected to see it express amazement, incredulity. It didn't, though. He laughed!

While Lance gaped, the older man went to the delicate machinery of the radiophone in one corner of the trim office. He clasped the earphones over his

head, and spoke into the mike: "Headquarters, Air Force, Washington, Douglas, Base 5, speaking."

A tense moment passed while his radio call was put through. Presently a green light flashed on the board. Douglas said swiftly: "Headquarters? Base 5, Colonel Douglas. Tanks massed around Hill 333; enemy evidently contemplates full attack on corresponding sector of our line. They know a scout of ours observed it, however; perhaps that will induce them to change their plans. This next is extremely important: *The first step of the Torpedo Plan has been successful!*"

For awhile he listened intently, replying with short-clipped affirmatives. Then he hung the headphones up and turned to the bewildered Lance. Colonel Douglas laughed again and rubbed his hands exultantly.

"What the hell—" Lance began. The other pulled out a drawer of his desk and took from it a small placard.

"Do you recognize the photo?" he asked smilingly.

Lance looked at it. It was the picture of a man in the uniform of a captain of the Air Force, a row of battle ribbons on his straight, khaki-clad chest. But it was the figure's face that Lance stared at.

"Sure," he said finally. "It's a picture of Praed. But what—"

"Not Praed," corrected the colonel. "Not Praed. Captain Basil Hay."

Part 3

"Good Lord!" Lance exclaimed without knowing he did so. Praed—Hay! The same man! Then that was the secret; that explained things! Hay, the hero of the force!

"You're entitled to a few explanations," Douglas said. "I'll give you the core of the whole scheme. There's no need to tell you that it must be guarded with your life." He drew his chair closer to Lance's.

"Yes, it's true. The man you knew as Praed in reality is Captain Hay. You see, Lance, headquarters was taking no chances with what I just called the Torpedo Plan. Every move had to be conducted with the utmost secrecy. Had to be! For the Torpedo Plan is, in some ways, America's last hope.

"Our base, No. 5, was chosen as the center of activity, the base from which the steps paving the way for the plan would be taken. The two best pilots in the service were needed. You and Hay were chosen.

"It was decided it would be best to mask Hay's real identity. So, officially, he was sent to the hospital; in reality he came here, under the name of Praed. Why? Because there's a spy somewhere—we don't seem to be able to track him; he's infernally clever—and if the famous Captain Hay was switched to Base 5, putting the two best pilots in the service together, that spy'd know something was in the air. Understand?"

Lance nodded dumbly. A great light was beginning to shower him.

"To more completely mask our true purpose," the colonel continued, "Hay was instructed to make it appear as if he were a spy. And it was a damned hard job! The real spy, whoever he is, and wherever he is, would thus be additionally fooled; for all he'd know, the Slavs might have sent another over to back him up. That's why Hay never shot down an enemy plane. Says something about his skill as a pilot, doesn't it? Never able to defend himself, save by maneuvering. He's a great flyer!"

Lance could only nod dumbly again.

"After a couple of weeks at this base," Douglas went on, "Hay was to cross the lines one night with you accompanying him. You, unintentionally, would thus occupy the enemy planes while Hay attended to the real business of the evening. And you did splendidly!"

"The real business?" Lance questioned. "What the devil was that? I thought the real business was to get the dope on Hill 333."

"So it was—partially. But also to take the first step of the Torpedo Plan, which was for Hay to switch over to a Slav plane."

"What?"

The colonel repeated his statement, somewhat dryly. Lance's square jaw dropped abruptly. "But—but—" he exclaimed, "how the devil could he do that?"

Colonel Douglas grinned.

"By a very neat contraption from the brain of one of our most valuable scientists," he explained. "Hay's

scout was specially fitted up before you left; while you were sleeping, in fact. Two experts from Washington arrived with that batch of new recruits this afternoon. A tiny sliding door was cut in the fuselage of the scout and a sort of folding ladder put inside. It was motivated by some rather complex spring-work; but the really ingenious thing about it was the powerful electro-magnet at its base.

"It's rather over my head," he smiled. "I'm a plain fighting man, and sometimes it seems that scientists and not fighting men are going to win this war.... But, at any rate, it worked like this:

"Hay lures, or maneuvers, a Slav plane away from its fellows, and while you're down below entertaining the others, flies wing to wing with it. He touches the spring of his ladder and it shoots out, powerfully magnetized, and clamps onto the steel fuselage of the Slav. The automatic control keeps Hay's scout steady, and the ladder is so highly attractive that the Slav simply can't get away. Hay crosses the gulf, taking with him the cord which controls the electro-magnet. He forces his way into the Slav, shoots down its pilot,

releases the pull of the magnet, and—there you are! Our best pilot in possession of a Slav plane, and clad in a Slav officer's uniform! Do you get the idea now?"

Lance strove for appropriate words. "Gee!" he spluttered. "It's—it's wonderful! And to think I tried to start a fight with Hay! I wish I'd known before. But I suppose," he added, "it was best to let not even me in on it, to keep it absolutely secret."

"Exactly!"

"And now what's Hay's mission?" Lance asked eagerly.

Colonel Douglas' face became sober. "A damnably dangerous one, and a mighty desperate one. As I said, the Torpedo Plan, which Hay is striving to carry out, seems to be America's last chance. We're holding the United Slavs, but only just. We simply can't break their line or make any headway against them; and when they do unleash their big push, there's nothing to stop them! So we're gambling everything on this slim hope.

"American science," he continued, "has perfected a weapon which is called the 'flying torpedo.' It's a ghastly thing, too. Damn it, I actually feel sorry for the poor devils it bursts on! It's a sort of riposte to their disintegrating flame.

"Picture a huge tanklike affair of steel, one hundred feet long. Picture a few dozen of them! Picture them crammed to overflowing with tons of glyco-scarzite, the most destructive explosive the mind of man has yet conceived. An explosive that can't be hurled in a shell and can't be dropped in a bomb from a plane. A pound or so of it, man, lays waste a square mile of anything! Even our scientists are a bit afraid of it. They've been trying to think up a way of unleashing it at the Slavs. And these flying torpedoes seem to be the answer.

"The torpedoes are purely mechanical. Therefore, they can soar to any height whatsoever. Twenty, thirty, even forty miles. All right. Now, picture a dozen or so of these torpedoes soaring over the most important Slav bases and headquarters, thirty miles above the earth, at night, of course, and absolutely

invisible to the most powerful search-rays. They fly without the slightest sounds. Get that? Well, when this squadron of awful death arrives at the exact point over the place to be demolished, the motive force switches off and down they crash. Imagine what will happen when they collide with the ground!" Douglas, with Lance's tense eyes on him, struck a clenched fist into an open palm.

"Tons of glyco-scarzite, Lance! Unleashed, without warning, from miles above! Thirty of these torpedoes, each a hundred feet long, dropping down on the very heart of the Slav invasion! Killing, blowing to bits, rather, every living thing, every fortification, every tree, every tank, every gun, every flame thrower, every plane in a radius of hundreds of miles!"

"God!" came from Lance's numb lips. "God!"

"*But*"—and the colonel held up a straight forefinger—"these torpedoes must be guided from the place they raid!"

Into the silence Lance whispered: "And that—that is Hay's job?"

"That," Douglas confirmed levelly, "is Hay's job—and yours."

Their eyes met; held. And then Lance's clean young face smiled.

"Thank God, sir," he cried, "that I'm to help strike the blow that'll free our country!"

Colonel Douglas answered his smile with a smile. "Lance," he said, "it's because Washington has put this job into Hay's and your hands that I know—*I know*—it will succeed."

"It will!"

Douglas lowered his voice again. "This is why those flying torpedoes must be guided from the Slav's innermost base.

"In the first place, they fly too high for an accompanying plane to guide them. In the second, the power that releases them to hurtle downwards must come from the enemy base itself, to permit of no possible error. This must not fail!"

"But," put in Lance, "how do the torpedoes fly? What motivates them?"

"A closely guarded secret, of course," he was told. "I merely possess a slight comprehension of it. I know that it is an adaptation of that discovery of Professor Singe, two years ago—cosmic attraction. Eventually, perhaps, it will permit interplanetary travel. This use of it is simply the beginning. But it is to America's everlasting glory that a scientist of hers developed it.

"You know how a sliver of wood is propelled by the ripples of a pond? Vibrations of the water, really. Well, evidently there are somewhat similar vibrations in the ether, cosmic force. Each one of these flying torpedoes contains a highly expensive, intricate mechanism which transforms this invisible vibration-power into material propulsion. The mechanism is

adjusted to propel the torpedo at such an altitude in such a direction. We possess no means of setting the machines to *stop* at a certain place and so tumble earthwards. That's where you and Hay come in.

"Hay is now, with forged documents, passing himself off as a regular Slav pilot. He speaks the tongue. Two nights from now, you, Lance, keep a rendezvous with Hay at an isolated ranch in the Lake Tahoe country—the Sola Ranch, where we staged that big fight a few months back."

Lance nodded.

"In your plane is an instrument which is the kernel of the scheme. It arrives here to-morrow. It's a device which shoots an invisible beam fifty miles into the air, a negative beam, in sympathy with the machinery on the torpedoes. Hay sets this device near the Slav headquarters. The torpedo squadron takes off from a few hundred miles behind here, flying in the direction of the heart of the Slav forces. When they run into the beam, their motive power is nullified, and down they fall. Crash! The Slavs are wiped out. Our troops

charge forward in a grand attack; the Slavs, with no armament, no reinforcing troops, no supply of tanks and flame throwers, crumple. The invasion of America is put to an end!"

Lance rose. His face was alight, his eyes burning with strong, unquenchable fire.

"It's great, sir, great! It can't fail! By God, if it takes every last drop of my blood, I'll help Hay put this through!"

Colonel Douglas extended his right hand and Lance's met it in a firm shake. In the thick silence they stood thus for some minutes. Then, without moving so much as a cheek muscle, the colonel whispered, his eyes tense:

"The door! Fling it open! I think someone's been listening!"

Lance switched his alarmed gaze to it. His muscles went taut. The next moment he had leaped half across

the room, jammed back the lock, and ripped the door wide.

At the other end of the dim passageway he glimpsed a scurrying figure!

Lance sprang after it with a shout to Douglas. Tearing out his automatic, he flung a burst of lead at the figure, but that instant it wheeled and sped from sight down another passage. And when Lance got there, no one was in sight.

For awhile he probed around, desperately, but could find no sign of anything. The base slept. Sorely troubled, he returned to find the colonel just coming back from an equally barren search:

"Don't think he heard much," said Douglas grimly. "It must have been that damned spy who's been getting information of our movements. I'll have the guards redoubled to prevent him from getting anything through." He smiled at sight of Lance's anxious face. "No need for too much worry, Lance! He couldn't have heard much—the walls are sound-proof and the door

fairly tight. Now, you go and rip off some sleep! You need it! No more work for you till Wednesday night—you're too important!"

Sleep! Lance only wished he could. But the thrill of what he'd just heard was too fresh, too new; the blood pumped surgingly through his veins; his brain whirled with the thought of the glorious enterprise he and Hay were aiding so vitally.

Then, too, the night was humid and sweaty. For a while Lance lay on his cot, other sleeping figures to left and right of him, but his own eyes simply would not stay closed. Finally, after perhaps an hour of trying to doze off, he arose and, clad only in breeches and undershirt, wandered outside again with a cigarette glowing in his mouth.

The war might not have been, the night was so silent. Lance strolled lazily around the plane hangars, revelling in what little breeze there was. He seemed to be the only living thing abroad in the night.

Then, suddenly, he flung down his cigarette and ground the butt out quickly. For he saw he was not the only living thing abroad in the night. Sliding rapidly away from the end hangar was a dark form!

Lance crouched instinctively and crept forward. Who was the other wanderer? Not a sentry: they paced a regular beat closer to Douglas' office. Not another, who, like himself, could not sleep and had sought the open. This figure was going somewhere! It had a definite object in mind!

Sheltering himself behind the hangars' bulk, Lance advanced as stealthily as he could. Coming to the end one, he peered round its blunt corner. Fifty yards ahead, crossing a stubbly stretch of open ground, the mysterious prowler hurried onward.

The night was dark, the moon troubled by ragged bursts of listless, heavy clouds. Lance bent almost double and left the shelter of the black hangar. Feeling his way carefully, he followed the other.

Was this the unknown spy? The spy, going to transmit the news he had overheard?

Lance muttered a curse. He had no weapon with him; the spy, if he were a spy, would certainly be armed. But that didn't matter; it was merely unfortunate. He must track the other down, at all cost.

For some minutes he crept on in this manner. The other kept hurrying forward. Lance noted a clump of brush far ahead; the figure was evidently making for this. And sure enough, as if acting directly on Lance's thought, the dark form entered the patch of growth—and did not come out on the other side.

Lance broke into a trot, eyes wary and alert for sign of his prey. At any second he might be greeted by a salvo of bullets, and every fiber of his lean body was taut.

As he approached the clump of brush he dropped to the ground, and came finally to it on his belly. From a distance of about ten feet, he rose and charged.

Expecting each moment to hear the spit of a revolver, he was more alarmed by what actually did greet him.

Nothing. The patch of brush was empty!

"Well I'll be damned!" Lance murmured. "Where did he get to?"

He gazed around, bewildered. The growth of bush was about ten feet wide. On either side the flat Nevada plain stretched away—empty. No figure was visible.

Lance was utterly baffled. The fellow had vanished as if by magic. Flown away into thin air!

The young captain stood quite still, listening, probing his puzzled brain.

Then, like a cat, he dropped to the ground again, and pressed an ear to it. For his ears had caught a tiny betraying hum.

A hum! There was a machine of some type near him. He listened intently. The hum came from the ground on which he lay. There had to be a trap-door.

Lance's fingers scrabbled around, and presently found what they looked for.

He seized the ring which enabled one to pull the trap-door back, and was just about to pull when he heard, from below, a voice speaking in Russian. It was, then, the spy!

Lance grasped the ring anew, and, exerting all his strength, hauled the trap-door back.

A narrow passageway was revealed, lit by a lamp. The hum burst with doubled force on his ears. He plunged down, fists clenched, and half tumbled into a tiny room gouged from the soil.

At one end was a mass of machinery, and a microphone hung suspended before it. And speaking into the microphone was the heavy-set form of a man in American uniform, his back to Lance. As the latter

charged down, he rose with an alarmed shout, and wheeled around.

"My God!" breathed Lance.

It was Ranth, Colonel Douglas' orderly!

Ranth!

His dark face flushed with fury, he came leaping from his seat. The wicked little revolver hung at his belt sprang out, but Lance's right fist shot forward, knocked Ranth's hand high and sent the gun clattering to the ground. Then, for a moment, they faced each other, the hum of the radiophone droning an ominous accompaniment.

"You!" Lance muttered. "So you were the spy!"

Ranth answered him with a choked oath and leaped forward again.

There were no niceties to that combat. It was a matter of life and death, and each knew it. Ranth

would kill him, Lance knew, if he possibly could; and he, he had to kill or capture Ranth. Otherwise the news of the Torpedo Plan would go through, Ranth would return to the base, and the secret of the hidden radio never be known. Another would be put in Lance's place; and when Hay kept his rendezvous at Sola Ranch....

He had to win.

No effort was made at defense, for those first few furious minutes. A veritable fusillade of hurtling fists stormed through the air. They each gave and took equally. Then Ranth's heavy shoulders bunched; cunningly he feinted, then, whirling, swung a vicious right hand smash to Lance's chin.

Lance reeled, fell, seeing Ranth's hate-contorted visage dance queerly in the close air before him. The orderly clutched for his revolver, and Lance bounded up as if spring-impelled, nailed the other with two lightninglike jabs and unleashed all his strength in an uppercut which sprawled Ranth in a limp, quivering heap.

Panting, Lance surveyed him, then turned to get the gun. He felt the shock of thudding flesh in his legs, and fell again with Ranth scrambling on top of him. Steel-ribbed hands pounced on his throat, gouged savagely, while the man above grunted thick curses from his slaver's mouth. Lance struggled fiercely; saw a curtain of black rush down. Desperately he hooked a booted leg up, craned it over Ranth's back, tugged. The terrible fingers loosened. Lance shook them off, rolled the other over and leaped once more to his feet, right hand clenched and ready.

Ranth staggered up. The young man measured him, pivoted, and smashed his beefy jaw with a clean swing that had every ounce of Lance's hard young body behind it.

The orderly shot back as if struck by a locomotive. He crashed into the radiophone, splintered the delicate instruments and slumped, eyes glazed, to the ground.

He was out. Dead out.

But how much had he got through on the radiophone before being stopped?

Had he told where the rendezvous, was to be? Told the time and place, and warned the Slavs to look for Hay?

Lance sighed, and was conscious that his left eye was rapidly closing, that a lip was split and his whole body sore. He slung Ranth over his shoulders and trudged wearily back to the base.

He told his story to Colonel Douglas' amazed ears. Ranth, come back to life, was slapped in handcuffs, and for some time the colonel put him through a stern inquisition.

But his lips were sealed. He would not divulge how much he had succeeded in passing on to the Slavs.

"A brave man," Douglas observed grimly when Ranth was carried off to the brig, "but it's death for him, the same as it would be death for Hay were he caught."

"I don't think he had a chance to get much across, sir," Lance said. "I was right on him almost as soon as he got there. You won't let this cancel our rendezvous?"

Douglas' thin lips smiled narrowly. "No. You'll be taking a greater chance, Lance, but we must gamble on how much the Slavs know. You're game, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir!"

Wednesday night came. Thunderstorms muttered to each other on the lowering horizons; gusts of fierce, wind-driven rain slanted down on the dripping base; occasionally a crooked finger of lightning probed the black sky and lit the whole sopping countryside with a searing, flashing glare.

The night patrol had taken off. A single plane, wet and gleaming under the sobbing heavens, stood on the tarmac, two heavily coated figures before it. Presently three more figures, carrying some bulky black object carefully between them, emerged from one of the

buildings. Tenderly they placed this object in the lone plane, which had been stripped of radio outfit and gas bomb compartment to provide room. Then the two original figures were left alone once more before the fighting machine. Far to the rear, the heavy American guns barked in their regular nightly bombardment.

"A good night for it," Colonel Douglas, scanning the sky, said, "and also a bad one. If only that damned lightning would stop!"

Lance, pulling on thick gloves, did not reply. The colonel consulted his watch.

"What time do you make it?" he asked.

"Exactly eight," the other answered.

"Right. At eight-six, you leave. At nine, on the dot, you meet Hay at Sola Ranch. At nine-ten, the torpedoes take off. At quarter to ten, they arrive over their destination—San Francisco and the surrounding territory. And quarter to ten, if things go correctly—which they must!—is the minute that ends the Slavish

invasion of America. At ten minutes to ten, five minutes after the torpedoes strike, our troops charge forward in general attack. God be with you, Lance! The fate of America is resting on your shoulders tonight, remember!"

"I'm remembering."

Colonel Douglas looked at the young man's grim, set face, looked at his lithe, clean-limbed figure and his steady black eyes which burned with a purposeful fire. And the colonel smiled.

"We'll win!" he said.

An orderly sped from his office, saluted, and rapped crisply:

"Order just received from Washington, sir, to proceed."

Lance clasped Douglas' hand, and leaped into the snug, enclosed cockpit. The four motors bellowed as

the thin-sprayed oil cascaded to them. The helicopter props spun around.

"Go to it, kid!" cried Douglas. "Spy or no spy, you're coming out on top! And give Hay a last handshake for me!"

And he swung to the salute.

Lance extended his hand. Then he gave his ship the gun, and the tiny, streamlined scout teetered, roared, and rose with a scream into the dripping darkness high above.

The Torpedo Plan had started.

PART IV

Lance hung for a moment at one thousand feet. A crack of lightning lit the base below for a second, and he perceived the colonel's straight figure with hand outstretched. Lance grinned, and gunned to forty thousand—an easy flying height, with his

superchargers pumping and air-rectifiers normalizing the enclosed pilot's seat.

"But what," he wondered, as he stopped the helicopters, "did he mean by 'give a *last* handshake'?"

He was soon to find out.

Behind him, in the fuselage, nestled the weird cluster of machinery which was the Singe beacon. It certainly did not look imposing—a mass of spidery tubes mazing round a bulky black box, which was, Lance guessed, some new type of generator. Out of the top of the device sprouted a funnel-like horn, from which, on the adjustment of the beacon's control studs, shot the nullifying ray. Lance could not suppress a shiver as he thought of the earth-shaking cataclysm that ray would conjure from the infinitely high heavens.

At forty thousand feet he was above the storm clouds, whose pitchy, vapor-drenched blackness effectively blanked out all sign of the earth. He might have been flying in outer space. Keeping a careful eye on his instruments, he set a course for Sola Ranch. He kept

his speed around three hundred, wishing to meet Hay exactly at nine.

But—would Hay be there?

How much did the Slavs know? How much had Ranth got through before he stopped him?

A frown creased his brow. It was best not to puzzle over that question. Best just to go ahead, and keep going.

At about three minutes to nine he set the plane's nose down through veils of clammy cloud. This was mountainous country, sparsely patrolled by Slav ships. Lance hovered cautiously over the firred mountain tops, getting his directions, shooting wary eyes through the magnifying mirrors in search of enemy scouts. He saw none. Satisfied, he cut the Rahl-Diesels, gunned the helicopter props and dropped lightly down on the stubbly field of Sola Ranch.

To left and right loomed the dim outlines of the lonely mountains. Before the war, the owner of Sola Ranch

had grown apples; this field had housed a few horses. It made a perfect meeting place—secluded, misty with the clinging mountain vapors, far apart from the war.

Lance felt like a prowling werewolf there, waiting for its ghostly mate.

Rain was still splattering in desultory bursts, but distance muted the rumbling salvos' of thunder. His watch told him it was one minute to nine.

Now—what?

Hay, or a swooping squadron of Slav planes?

Lance stepped out of the cockpit into the rain, though holding himself tensely ready to leap back again and soar away. He stared around, and peered above.

Was that a shadow?—a nightmare flying bird?—or a plane?

He grasped a hand-flash, and rapidly signalled his identity. The next instant, it seemed, the shadow wavered, then fell earthward with great speed.

Out of the gloom and rain it came—an enemy plane.

It dropped down beside his scout. From its cockpit came a few swift flashes of light.

Hay!

Lance ran eagerly over to the other plane, and out from its enclosed cabin stepped the man he had known as Praed.

Wordlessly, they gripped hands. Hay's thin, straight face wore a smile, and he met Lance's eyes keenly. Lance stammered:

"S-sorry, Captain Hay, about—about the way I treated you at the base. You see, I had no idea who you were."

Hay cut short his apologies with a laugh. "Rot! I'd've been the same way myself." He glanced rapidly at

Lance's plane. "Got it?" he questioned. "I'm a bit late; had a hell of a time getting here without arousing suspicion. We'd best hurry."

Lance nodded. They hurried to the Goshawk. As they worked, carefully lifting out the Singe beacon, Lance, in crisp, short-clipped sentences, told his companion of Ranth, the spy.

"You don't know how much he got through?"

"No," said Lance. "No."

"Hm-m. Well, we'll have to trust to luck."

"You know the working of the beacon?" Lance asked. On the other's nod of affirmation he continued: "What's your plan?"

"Light about five miles this side of Frisco itself, just near the main Slav military base. Anywhere in that territory would do, though. The beacon doesn't go up in a narrow ray; it spreads, diffuses. The squadron of torpedoes will cover some fifty or sixty miles of

ground, I believe. They'll utterly demolish the city, and every damned Slav in it." His face, in the darkness, went grim and hard. "And it'll damn well pay them back," he rasped, "for the horrible way they massacred San Francisco's population...."

The Singe beacon was in his plane. Hay turned to Lance, stretching out his hand for a farewell clasp. Then Lance asked the question that had been worrying him.

"Colonel Douglas told me to give you a last handshake for him. *Last*. Why did he say that?"

"Because," Hay said smilingly, "I'm staying by the beacon to make sure that nothing goes wrong. I guess that's why he said it, old fellow...."

Lance gasped: "You're sacrificing your life?"

"Of course. To save seventy-five million others."

Then suddenly they both stared above.

A roar of sound—of purring motors, of props, mixed with the chatter of a dozen machine-guns—had belched with numbing suddenness from the low-hanging clouds.

Enemy planes! A patrol of them!

"God!" jerked Lance. "Ranth's warning got through! Part of it, anyway!"

He leaped for his plane, shouting: "I'll hold 'em off! You get away *quick*!" and, through a veritable hail of lead, sprang into the cockpit.

Then, a cold pang at his heart, he sprang out again.

A bullet had caught Hay!

For a moment, the Slav fire ceased, while their planes zoomed up to start another death-dealing dive. And in that moment Lance was at Hay's side, where he had fallen.

"They—got me," whispered Hay, a stream of blood welling from his gasping mouth. "I'm—I'm going. C-carry me to—to your plane. I've still a—a little strength left. You take the beacon. I—I'll hold them—as—as long as—I can. Put through that beacon, boy! *Put it though!*"

His brain a maelstrom, Lance stared at the crumpled figure. It was the only way! He heard the motors above come roaring down again; desperately he carried the blood-choking Hay to his own plane; propped him limply at the controls. Bullets spat through a frenzy of noise. Weakly Hay started the Goshawk's Diesels, and weakly, into Lance's face, smiled, and beckoned him to leave.

And, as Lance, a grim resolve at his heart, turned, Hay's blood-frothed lips formed the words: "Carry on!"

Through the raining lead, seeming to bear a charmed life, Lance leaped to Hay's plane, hearing as he did so his own, with a stricken pilot at its controls, hurtle upwards.

Carry on! For the life of America!

Carry on!

Ten minutes past the hour of nine. A full thousand miles behind the lines, on the wide black field of America's major war base, a small group of men stood, surveying the awesome weapons assembled there.

Row upon row of huge, dully-gleaming cigar-shaped things stretched away into the darkness before them. There were only one or two faint lights to give illumination, and the night choked in on them, making them terrifying.

They resembled, more than anything else, half-sized dirigibles, being roughly about one hundred feet long and perhaps as much as thirty feet high. At first sight, they seemed to be numberless; then, as the bewildered eye became more sane, one could count them and see that there were, in reality, about thirty. Their prows were stubby; in the port side of each a tiny trap-door yawned, and standing by every trap-

door was the overall-clad figure of a mechanic, waiting for the signal.

The Commander of the American Air Force looked up from his wrist-watch. At his side was a peculiar gnomelike figure, a figure with hunched, twisted back and huge, over-heavy head. This was Professor Singe, and from that ridiculous head had come the germ which had finally expanded into the torpedoes arrayed before him.

His eyes were nervous; his crooked face twitched ceaselessly. "Time?" he kept asking. "Time? Is it yet time?" And finally the tall figure of the Commanding Officer turned and rapped: "Time!"

An aide-de-camp raised a hand. As if working by some mechanical device, the figure which stood by each torpedo climbed through the trap-doors, jumped out a second later, and came running to the head of the field.

"About thirty seconds," muttered Singe nervously, eyes alight. "Thirty seconds for their motors to catch the stream. Thirty—ah!"

For the squadron of man-made horrors had stirred.

"God pity San Francisco!" murmured the Commanding Officer, and stepped back involuntarily as the whole fleet lifted their glyco-scarzite crammed bellies from the field and, as if moved by some magical, unseen, unheard force, shot up into the darkness with ever gathering speed.

"God pity it, indeed!" chuckled Singe exultantly. "It'll need it!"

The C. O. sighed and shook his head slowly. "War!" he mused. "And yet, it's our only chance." For a moment he paused, seemingly unconscious of the macabre little form next to him, still gazing aloft at the now invisible torpedoes, and then muttered:

"And God pity Basil Hay, who's giving his life to America—a glorious, unselfish hero. God pity Basil Hay!"

American flyers never knew of Basil Hay's last fight. Had they, it would have become legendary.

For Hay fought a grim battle against two foes. One, he could face and conquer, as he had conquered often before. But the other lurked next to his dauntless heart, and it Hay could not subdue.

It was death.

Truly, Hay's fight there in the wet clouds above Sola Ranch was an inspired one. He fought almost by instinct alone, instinct twenty years of piloting had planted deep in his veins. He fought for Lance—for America. His eyes, glazing rapidly, could not distinguish the roaring phantoms that laced around his lone plane, but uncannily his bursts of fire went home again and again, while theirs ripped aimlessly over the Goshawk's hell-driven snout.

Of course it could not last. Gallant spirit alone kept Basil Hay taut at his controls. Spirit alone thrust back the ever-increasing surge of black oblivion that pounded at his heart and brain. Spirit alone sent the pitifully outnumbered plane corkscrewing in peerless maneuverings that baffled the on-passing Slavs and thrust four of them to the sodden ground in flame. Spirit that would not surrender—but had to.

They could never have conquered Basil Hay in a plane. An ambushing bullet that caught him off guard did that. And finally Hay fell.

But he had kept them for ten full minutes. Ten minutes—each one a lasting, mute testimony to his unquenchable, unyielding spirit.

He flung a last salvo from his hot machine-guns, then, heart numbing, jerked back the control-stick and careened high. He slumped down. The plane paused, wallowed crazily for a moment, and then roared earthward, "Carry on!" formed faintly on its dead pilot's bloody lips.

Basil Hay had fought his last fight.

Ten minutes....

Lance hadn't expected that long. He'd thought Hay would die in a few seconds. The man was mortally wounded; could not last.

Nevertheless, minutes or seconds, he was entrusted with the Singe beacon, and it was his job and his will to put it through.

He'd climbed the Slav plane up to its ceiling, driven it till it simply refused to go higher, and then roared on towards San Francisco. Each second he expected to see others come hurtling after him. When they did not, he knew how really great Hay's will was. It was an inspiring example.

But his brain was tortured by a multitude of conflicting doubts. A patrol of Slav scouts had ambushed them. Just how much did the Slavs know, then, about the torpedoes?

He, Lance, had to guide the Singe beacon. Quickly he reviewed what Hay had told him.

"Light about five miles this side of Frisco. Anywhere in that territory would do, though. The beacon doesn't go up in a narrow ray; it spreads, diffuses."

Spreads, diffuses.

Hay had been clad in Slav uniform, and thus could, with a certain measure of safety, put the beacon machinery on the ground itself. But Lance was in American uniform; if he landed, he ran great risk of being noticed and attacked at once.

Lance saw immediately that there was only one way out. It was sure death, but Hay had expected death, and so must he.

His lips set in stern resolve. It meant good-by—farewell to the girl he'd left behind, farewell to life, farewell to everything—but not for a second did he debate the course he would take.

Lance glanced at his watch. Nine-thirty. The torpedoes were even now on their way, hurtling along miles above the earth. In fifteen minutes they would be over San Francisco. In fifteen minutes the Singe beacon had to meet them.

He was not familiar with the Slav plane's instruments, but he judged he'd traveled some hundred and twenty-five miles; was nearing the outskirts of San Francisco. The air below would be thick, probably, with enemy scouts, but his appearance should pass unchallenged as long as they didn't glimpse his betraying uniform.

He set the plane's nose down in a long slanting dive.

Whipping through the clouds, the guarding search-rays of San Francisco were soon visible. Lance saw a few patrols of enemy scouts; he clung to the clouds, decreased his speed, and began circling over the heart of the metropolis itself.

Twenty to ten.

Occasionally a Slav plane flashed by him. Thank God, they didn't challenge! Lance went still lower. Finally, at a thousand feet, he set the helicopter props in motion and hung in mid-air—directly above the very center of the city.

Sixteen minutes to ten.

Now!

In the American front-line trenches, massed troops crouched expectantly. Clustered on every air base were flights of planes, each one crammed with bombs. Far behind, the Yank gun-crews edged nervously up to their mighty charges, and fingered anxiously the stubby gas shells which soon would be flung through the dripping night.

And at Base No. 5 a very uneasy Colonel Douglas paced back and forth in his office, muttering: "No news from Lance! No news from Lance! God! He can't have failed! But why doesn't he show up?"

He had not failed.

Hovering in the plane over San Francisco Lance squirmed round in his seat, reached back into the fuselage, and pressed rapidly the studs on the Singe beacon. A high whining noise pierced instantly through the plane. And up stabbed the beacon, invisible, deadly—up, up, up to a thin realm miles above, where it flashed into an awesome squadron of terrible shells of steel!

Shells that, a second later, wavered, staggered, and plunged earthward!

And Lance tensed in his seat. From above, he caught a tiny whistling noise—a whistling that hurtled into a terrific shriek—that roared ever closer.

"Carry on!" he muttered. "Carry on!"

The words froze on his lips, for the world was suddenly consumed, it seemed, by flame and splitting, bellowing thunder.

The American guns spoke.

From every aerodrome long flights of scouts and bombers and transport planes roared upward.

In the front trenches the troops, still somewhat dazed by the earth-shaking explosion that had just tumbled from the far horizon—a horizon still lit by leaping tongues of awful flame—poured over the top, gas-masks on, repeaters and portable machine-guns at the ready, with a fierce cry on their lips.

Before that avenging attack the Slavs, their very spine broken, bewildered and confused, already turning in panic, could not stand.

America swept to the Pacific, and left death in her wake. And when she came to San Francisco, not even the sternest fighting men, still hot from battle, could repress a shudder, so awful was the devastation.

The Slav invasion was over!

In the rebuilt city of San Francisco there is a statue that stands proudly before the magnificent, gleaming city hall.

It represents two slim, straight-standing figures, clad in the uniform of the American Air Force. Their outstretched arms support a tiny one-seater Goshawk fighting plane.

Below, as you know, there is a plaque. Men touch their hats as they walk by it; flowers are always fresh at its base. On the plaque are the words:

To The Everlasting
Memory Of

Captain Basil Hay, A.A.F.
Captain Derek Lance, A.A.F.

Who, In The War Of 1938, Gave
Their Lives In Destroying And
Devastating San Francisco
That San Francisco And America
Might Live